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SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2029  
TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC BA  
SUBJECT: POPULAR ANGER OVER GAZA, GOVERNMENT BACKS EGYPT

REF: MANAMA 6

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Bahrain's top Shia cleric implied the GOB had "sold out" to the U.S. There are numerous calls for more demonstrations. An official expressed fear of popular reactions, urged the U.S. to press Israel to better protect civilians, and expressed support for Egypt's approach. End summary.

#### Top Cleric Hits U.S.-Bahrain Ties

¶2. (SBU) In a January 7 sermon, Bahrain's most popular Shia cleric Shaikh Isa Qassim said the "silence" of most Arab governments on Gaza amounted to collaboration with Israel and the U.S. Some of these Arab governments had "sold out" by accepting U.S. protection in exchange for silence. The sermon was reported in local newspapers and websites, and is widely viewed as having crossed an informal red line into criticism of Bahrain's security relationship with the U.S.

¶3. (C) Qassim's attack reflected sincere anger in reaction to events in Gaza, but was also calculated to put pressure on the GOB to address the grievances of Bahraini Shia (septel).

#### Calls for More Demonstrations

¶4. (SBU) Bahrain's large Ashura processions January 6 and 7 were orderly, but included several speeches from radical Shia leaders equating Gazans' suffering with the Shia passion story, and criticizing the GOB over domestic issues (septel). There were several unauthorized small demonstrations late January 8 in predominantly Shia areas. Numerous Shia and Sunni clerics have called for pro-Palestinian demonstrations after Friday prayers tomorrow, January 9. Local media featured prominently more gruesome photos from Gaza.

#### MFA: "Fear" of Popular Reaction; Bahrain Backs Egypt

¶5. (C) MFA Undersecretary Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa told CDA January 8 that the GOB was "shocked" at the scale of civilian suffering in Gaza. He said Bahrain's leaders "fear how the man in the street here will react." Because of this, he said, King Hamad would convene later that day an extraordinary meeting of Bahrain's cabinet to "raise the profile" of Bahrain's opposition to Israeli actions in Gaza. He requested that the USG urge Israel to exercise restraint in order to avoid additional civilian casualties in Gaza. CDA cited U.S. financial support for UNWRA and senior USG public statements on the priority of the protection of noncombatants, but undertook to convey the Bahraini request to Washington.

¶6. (C) Shaikh Abdulaziz said Bahrain "fully backs" the Egyptian approach to Gaza. (Egypt's Ambassador here told CDA separately that King Hamad had phoned President Mubarak to

express support.)

¶ 7. (SBU) Septel reports EAC meeting on security implications of local reactions.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/manama/>

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